DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 262 519 EC 180 927

AUTHOR McClellan, Elizabeth
TITLE Defining Giftedness. 1985 Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children, Reston, Va.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 85
CONTRACT 400-84-0010
NOTE 3p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children, 1920 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091 (one free copy).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Definitions; Elementary Secondary Education; *Gifted; Government Role; *Student Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

The digest examines conceptions of giftedness. A brief historical review notes L. Terman's work and impetus for increasingly broadened definitions since the 1940's. The 1969 Marland Report is cited and its definition of giftedness is presented. Current response to that definition's inclusion of six achievement areas (general academic ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability) is noted. The federal definition of giftedness as contained in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 is provided. More recent emphasis on high performance capability in mathematics, science, foreign languages, or computer learning is noted. It is suggested that the ways in which schools operationally define giftedness are often based on the needs of society. Concluding points center on reasons for defining giftedness and considerations in deciding not only what giftedness is but how the gifted are identified and what services schools should provide. (CL)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ERIC

Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children
1920 Association Drive,
Reston, Virginia 22091

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

1985
DIGEST

FD262519

# DEFINING GIFTEDNESS

**What is Giftedness?**

For over a century, researchers, scientists, and educators have been trying to define the term "gifted." Historically, giftedness has been closely linked with the concept of genius. This association began around the turn of the century when psychologists developed tests that were designed to measure intelligence (cf. Terman, 1925); people who scored on the low end of the scale were labeled retarded, and those who scored on the high end were considered geniuses. The use of intelligence tests as the single measure of giftedness has been greatly criticized in recent years, primarily because the tests are often biased in favor of the white middle class and because they penalize children with differing linguistic styles. Also, many researchers and educators have come to believe that giftedness is more than high intellectual ability; it also includes creativity, memory, motivation, physical dexterity, social adeptness, and aesthetic sensitivity.

Dissatisfaction with a limited perspective has led researchers and educators to develop "broadened" definitions. One of the first educators to write about such an expansion was Leta Hollingsworth. Although her research focused on children with IQ's above 170, Hollingsworth believed that children can have other types of gifts, such as mechanical aptitude or artistic ability (Pritchard, 1951).

During the 1940's, the conception of giftedness was expanded further when the federal government began to take an interest in the education of gifted and talented children. This federal interest was sparked during and after World War II when policy makers perceived a need for technological advancement in order to maintain the nation's military and political superiority. By 1950, Congress had passed the National Science Foundation Act which marked the first time the federal government provided funds specifically for the gifted and talented (Zettel, 1982). By providing funds for encouraging students to develop their abilities in mathematics and the physical sciences, the Act led, in essence, to the designation of specific academic aptitude as a type of giftedness.

Another significant development in the expansion of the definition of giftedness was the publication of J. P. Guilford's (1959) studies of the structure of the intellect. As early as 1950, Guilford had been urging psychologists to explore the area of creativity, or divergent thinking, but it was his structural model of the 120 theoretical components of intelligence that led to the development of tests that measure intellectual abilities other than those measured by conventional IQ tests. The development of creativity tests and the results of many studies of the relationship between intelligence and creativity (cf. Getzels & Jackson, 1962), have led many educators to include creativity in their definitions. Renzulli (1978), for example, considers giftedness to be a combination of above average ability, creativity, and task commitment.

In 1969, Congress mandated a study by the U.S. Commissioner of Education to determine the extent to which the needs of gifted and talented children were being met (Sisk, 1980). The ensuing document, known as the Marland Report (1972), contains a definition of giftedness that has been and continues to be the one most widely adopted or adapted by state and local education agencies. The Report states:

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differential educational programs and/or services beyond those provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and the society.
>
> Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:
>
> 1. General intellectual ability.
> 2. Specific academic aptitude.
> 3. Creative or productive thinking.
> 4. Leadership ability.
> 5. Visual and performing arts.
> 6. Psychomotor ability.

Although the definition has been criticized as being limiting (Reis & Renzulli, 1982) and of promoting elitism (Feldman, 1979), more than 80% of the 204 experts polled for their reactions to the Marland definition agreed with the selection of the categories of high intellectual ability, creative or productive thinking, specific academic aptitude, and ability in visual or performing arts. Approximately half of the experts agreed that social adeptness and psychomotor ability should be included (Martinson, 1975).

The federal government has included five broad areas in the definition found in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981. In this act, block grants for education have been provided to the states, some of these funds may be used for:

> special programs to identify, encourage, and meet the special educational needs of children who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership capacity, or specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities.

More recently, the Regulations for the Educational Security Act of 1984, which provides grants for strengthening the skills of teachers and instruction in mathematics,

EC180927

science, foreign languages, and computer learning have defined the term "gifted student" as a "student, identified by various measures, who demonstrates actual or potential high performance capability in the fields of mathematics, science, foreign languages, or computer learning." Gifted students may come from "historically underrepresented and underserved groups, including females, minorities, handicapped persons, persons of limited English-speaking proficiency, and migrants."

By placing an emphasis on math, science, foreign languages, and computer learning, this latest federal definition highlights the fact that the ways in which schools operationally define giftedness are often based on the needs of society. Definitions are also influenced by cultural and socioeconomic factors. As Ernest Bernal points out, "what is clever and creative for a child in the barrio or on the reservation, where different value systems are in operation, will not be the same as for the child who grows up in the suburbs" (1974, p. 268). For economically disadvantaged populations that place a heavy emphasis on preparing students for employment rather than college, a definition might recognize that students can be gifted in areas that are generally nonacademic in nature, such as carpentry or mechanics (McClellan, 1984).

**Why Do We Need to Define Giftedness?**

A definition of giftedness is the foundation upon which an educational program for gifted children is built. The specific abilities included in a definition determine the kinds of identification criteria that are used to select children for a program and the kinds of educational services that are provided to those children. The selection of abilities to be included in a definition is, therefore, very important to educators who must determine which children are designated as gifted and what kinds of educational services are provided to them. For example, a definition that incorporates creativity as a category suggests that schools provide experiences aimed at developing the potential of children who have been identified as being creative; a definition that includes leadership ability suggests other types of identification criteria and educational experiences.

Educators who are charged with the responsibility of creating or maintaining programs for gifted children and youth face a different task when they must decide what giftedness is, how gifted children can be identified, and what services schools should provide. The following points are a guide for helping them make those decisions:

- The concept of giftedness is not limited to high intellectual ability. It also comprises creativity, ability in specific academic areas, ability in visual or performing arts, social adeptness, and physical dexterity.
- A program for gifted children should be based on the way in which the school system operationally defines giftedness. A definition should be the basis of decisions regarding the selection of identification procedures as well as the provision of educational services for gifted children.
- Definitions of giftedness are influenced by social, political, economic, and cultural factors.
- Giftedness is found among all groups, including females, minorities, handicapped persons, persons with limited English-speaking proficiency, and migrants.

**REFERENCES**


Bernal, E. M. (1974). Gifted Mexican American children: An ethnoscientific perspective. *California Journal of Educational Research, 25*, 261-273.

Feldman, D. (1979). Toward a nonelitist conception of giftedness. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 660-663.

Getzels, J. W. & Jackson, P. W. (1962). *Creativity and intelligence*. London: John Wiley & Sons.

Guilford, J. P. (1959). Three faces of intellect. *American Psychologist, 14*, 469-479.

Marland, S. P. (1972). *Education of the gifted and talented*. Report to the Congress of the United States by the U.S. Commissioner of Education. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Martinson, R. A. (1975). *The identification of the gifted and talented*. Reston, VA: The Council for Exceptional Children.

McClellan, E. (1974). *Defining giftedness: An ethnographic approach*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA.

*Omnibus budget reconciliation act of 1981*, Section 582, 42 USC 3842.

Pritchard, M. C. (1951). The contribution of Leta Hollingsworth to the study of gifted children. In P. Witty (Ed.), *The gifted child*. New York: D. C. Heath.

*Regulations for the education for economic security act of 1984*. Part 208, Section 208.3.

Reis, S. M. & Renzulli, J. S. (1982). A case for a broadened conception of giftedness. *Phi Delta Kappan, 63*, 619-620.

Renzulli, J. (1978). What makes giftedness? *Phi Delta Kappan, 60*, 180-184.

Sisk, D. (1980). Issues and future directions in gifted education. *The Gifted Child Quarterly, 24*, 29-32.

Terman, L. (1925). *Genetic studies of genius: Volume I. mental and physical traits of a thousand gifted children*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Zettel, J. J. (1982). The education of gifted and talented children from a federal perspective. In J. Ballard, B. Ramirez, & F. J. Weintraub (Eds.), *Special education in America: Its legal and governmental foundations*. Reston, VA: The Council for Exceptional Children.



Prepared by Elizabeth McClellan, Coordinator, Project RETOOL, The Council for Exceptional Children.

ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated.

The National Institute of Education

This publication was prepared with funding from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. 400-83-0031. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NIE or the U.S. Department of Education.